DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 897 TM 830 786

AUTHOR Milofsky, Carl
TITLE Intelligence Testing and Race in the Public Schools.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, (Detroit, MI, August 31-September 4, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Intelligence Tests; *Racial Bias; Referral; Rural Urban Differences; *School Psychologists; Special Education; Student Evaluation; *Test Bias; Testing; *Testing Problems; Test Interpretation; Test Use; *Time Management; Urban Education

ABSTRACT

The presented observations are primarily ethnographic and concern the way intelligence tests are given in schools, how biases in tests might be overcome and how black and white children are differently tested. Data on differences in testing patterns were collected via a 1978 survey of school psychologists in Illinois. The data concern the length of time psychologists report spending with each child they test and a closely related variable, the number of tests psychologists conduct during a school year. A strong negative correlation was found between the number of "child studies" psychologists conducted each year--more than twice as many in Chicago as compared with elsewhere in Illinois--and the time devoted to each one--3.6 hours in Chicago as compared with 6.6 hours elsewhere. As psychologists give more tests, which they do in the city, they spend less time on each child study--less time for thought, consideration, or special measures. This document offers a "sort of pneumatic theory" of time budgeting and testing patterns among school psychologists. (PN)

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INTELLIGENCE TESTING AND RACE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Carl Milofsky
Department of Sociology
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania 17801

This paper was prepared for meetings of the American Sociological Association, Detroit, Michigan, August 31 to September 4, 1983.

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INTELLIGENCE TESTING AND RACE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

On the most overt level, the reason we have schools is to make unskilled children into intelligent adults. Having certain essential intellectual skills is generally assumed to help people gain entrance to adult careers which have a lot of prestige and pay a lot of money. While sociologists might question whether it is actually the skills people acquire which confer status on them when they enter high prestige occupations (Jencks et al 1972) we do not argue that education is unimportant in the status allocation process or that there are differences in intellectual performance which at least play gatekeeping functions. Using education to improve intellectual skills has been a cornerstone of most broad gauged reform programs aimed at decreasing inequality in America as well as that between the developed and underdeveloped world.

Accepting that improvement in intellectual performance helps to reduce inequality, reformers have long debated whether the intelligence of poor children and especially those from racial minorities can be substantially improved. From the time that intelligence testing was first introduced in this country around 1915, psychologists have noted that members of low income minorities have markedly lower IQs than natives of Northern European extraction who are middle class. From the outset, some psychologists have argued that these differences reflect genetically determined differences in the intellectual constitution of different ethnic groups. These early speculations have been repeated more recently by people like Arthur Jensen (1969) and Robert Herrnstein (1973).

From the outset, these genetic speculations have been loudly

and effectively challenged, first by outspoken progressives like Walter Lippman (1922) and more recently by supporters of the civil rights movement. Genetic arguments have persisted partly because their supporters claim that careful experimental research supports the genetic hypothesis. Leon Kamin (1974) has pretty well demolished any claims Arthur Jensen might have that his genetic argument is scientifically respectable. The debates go on, however. They go on mainly because whatever the state of the scientific debates improving the intellectual performance of low income people through education has proven to present intractable problems. Over time, the average IQs of most minority groups have gone up as their members have become more assimilated into urban American society. In the short term, however, we have not been very successful at improving the school performance of low income and minority children.

Whatever the scientific evidence, intellectual differences between groups provide powerful symbols for arguments in support of social policy. Understandably while science is wheeled in to mystify the audience and to justify policy conclusions---I say mystify because of Kamin's (1974) work showing that much of the genetic psychology used to justify genetic differences between races has been badly done---the real appeal of arguments about race differences in intelligence has to do with broadly recognized social policy problems and with equally widely held beliefs that intellectual talent is intimately related to those problems. In the 1920s the problem was the flood of immigrants whom natives saw as a threat to their safety and hegemony. Arguing that they were intellectually deficient and that this deficiency was genetically

caused provided ammunition for Congress to pass laws setting immigration quotas. In the 1960s and 1970s, the policy problem was that blacks were demanding equal opportunity in education and in jobs. Evidence that they are intellectually inferior and that this deficit could not be corrected provided ammunition to those who would curtail compensatory education programs and affirmative action.

It is important to recognize that the impetus for scientific arguments about the nature of intelligence arises from popular culture and public perceptions about how intelligence matters in social life. Most people who have been drawn into the argument about whether or not there are racial differences in intelligence have not asked where those public perceptions come from and what causes the social conditions that lead to those perceptions. Rather than focussing on social conditions in which intelligence is measured and in which differences are compared, the debate about whether or not blacks are intellectually inferior has focussed mainly on the question of whether or not intelligence tests are culturally biased so that they will produce lower scores for blacks than for whites.

By asking whether or not the tests are biased we are distracted. Rather than thinking about class conflicts in schools, we challenge genetic psychologists on scientific grounds. This does not address the question of what institutional conditions lead members of the public to perceive blacks---or Chicanoes or Appalacians or poor people generally---as stupid. Testing has a great deal to do with that perception since reading scores and certification that children are retarded provide concrete evidence to the public about the intellectual performance of minorities. Yet we do not know what

if anything the scientific properties of tests have to do with the test scores public schools produduce and which serve as the basis for public beliefs about intellectual differences.

This paper provides data showing that whether or not individual intelligence tests are culturally biased towards blacks in the scientific sense is relatively unimportant when it comes to explaining different rates of mental retardation among black and white children referred for special education classes in public schools. I do not offer an elaborate statistical argument about variations in the IQ distribution in different groups. My observations are primarily ethnographic and concern the way intelligence tests are given in schools, how biases in tests might be overcome and how black and white children are differently tested. Data on these differences in testing patterns come from a survey I conducted of school psychologists in Illinois in 1978.

While mental retardation has not received much attention from sociologists, differences in the rates of retardation between blacks and whites or slavs and Northern Europeans have long been key bits of evidence in the arguments of genetic psychologists. Goddard's (1912) history of the Kallikak family and the inheritance of retardation in that family was powerful in its time as data supporting claims about genetic differences in IQ between social classes. Jensen similarly directs much of his attention to mental retardation and especially to the peculiar finding that black retarded children seem to be socially normal while white retardates are spontaneously identified by people in the community as incompetent (Jensen 1972; Mercer 1973). The finding that the majority of children in classes

for the mildly retarded were until the 1970s (when diagnostic categories were changed) black boys has long been a key of evidence to those arguing for the intellectual inferiority of blacks. I will suggest here that this overrepresentation and the resulting public perceptions have as much to do with institutionalized testing practices as with characteristics of black children.

BIAS IN INTELLIGENCE TESTING.

In 1977 and 1978 I conducted a study of school psychologists in Illinois to learn how they carried out intelligence testing and what relationship if any their manner of testing had to the tendency for minority children to be overrepresented in special education classes. I came to this study after working with a lawyer who helped with litigation in which it was argued that minority children are improperly labeled and placed in classes for the mentally retarded at the expense of other children who truly are handicapped but who are excluded from those classes. This legal activity ultimately resulted in passage of the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act which among other things mandates elaborate procedural protections for children being evaluated for special class placement (Kirp, Buss and Kuriloff 1974; Bersoff 1982). I had completed a book on how misclassification comes about in some California elementary schools for my dissertation and I was convinced that the new federal legislation would not do much to change conditions in urban schools because it relied too heavily on the assumption that the testing that was done in schools was like that done in the laboratories where tests were developed. Having talked with and observed school psychologists in my first study, I knew that testing

often was carried out under intense pressure on school psychologists from regular educators and that frequently testing was hurried and not very careful.

From that first study I also had learned about the misgivings many clinical and academic psychologists have about the ways intelligence tests are used in schools. Educators tend to care most about obtaining IQ scores and clean, decisive descriptions about what is wrong with children they have referred for testing so they can decide what to do with them---whether to put them in classes for the learning disabled or mentally retarded or keep them in regular classrooms. Many psychologists, unlike Arthur Jensen, are profoundly distrustful of IQ scores knowing that they are likely to be biased both by cultural background and by the conditions under which tests are given. If a child is angry or anxious or unwilling to try one is not likely to obtain an accurate intelligence reading. It is important for children to believe that the psychologist is a friendly or at least a neutral figure and it is important that trust and a certain rapport build up between the child and the examiner if one is to have a hope of gaining an accurate score.

Even taking this sort of care, test results may be inaccurate. It is important that results from intelligence tests be compared to data gathered by interviewing parents and teachers and observing the child at play, at home or in class. Even with this additional data, psychologists prefer not to take test scores very seriously. Rather, they like to think of testing as the first step in a therapeutic process. Tests are helpful because they allow one to gather a lot of information in a short period of time. Being highly

structured, they also allow one to compare one's present subject with hundreds of others one has observed in other testing sessions. They allow one to formulate hypotheses about why a child is having difficulties in school or at home. Sometimes those speculations lead one to look more closely at the home or the school than at the child who perhaps is only revealing the symptoms of some broader interactional problem.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act recognizes the need for multiple sources of information and requires that data on classroom behavior, a child's home life and neurological problems be included in the evaluation hearing in which special class placements are decided. In practice, this mandated assemblage of information about children does not produce the sort of data psychologists outside of schools think needs to be added to test scores to make them useful. Different school personnel collect each of the several required pieces of data and then they are assembled in marathon meetings where dozens of children are discussed. Data on home life or staff conflicts at school rarely carry much weight. Berk, Bridges and Shih (1981) have shown the IQ score alone becomes the best predictor of whether or not a child will be placed in a special education class.

Berk, Bridges and Shih (1981) studied the evaluation process in the special education programs of the Chicago public schools. Unfortunately, there is no data comparable to their Chicago data for schools outside of the city. What I observed is that in many suburban schools---even those with minority and low income student populations---school psychologists outside of the City of Chicago were likely to collect a variety of kinds of data on children

other than data they obtained from testing sessions. These psychologists were more likely than were Chicago psychologists to regularly talk with teachers both about children and about the organizational problems that confronted them in teaching. It is no surprise to sociologists that staff conflicts and other institutional crises affect student behavior and performance in schools and that people thinking about placing children in special classes should be attentive to these factors. School psychologists have tended to take an individualistic approach to studying children, however, and so they have had to be lectured at repeatedly by community psychologists like Seymour Sarason and his colleagues about the importance of taking interactional factors into account when diagnosing learning difficulties (Sarason and Doris 1979; McIntyre 1969; Lighthall and Braun 1976; etc.).

If school psychologists share the skepticism of academic and clinical psychologists about the accuracy of intelligence testing for diagnosing children and placing them in special education classes, whatever cultural biases might reside in tests become less consequential. Such psychologists would, hopefully, be aware and concerned about the possibilities that cultural bias would hide a child's "true" intellectual ability. If they are aware of this as one of several sorts of bias, they can look for evidence that test results do not make sense for a particular child and that they do not fit into the rest of his or her life pattern. Jane Mercer (1973) published a book describing how school psychologists could take a variety of social factors into account in determining mental retardation. She argued that taking social factors into account wipes out the overrepresentation of blacks among the mildly retarded. Taking these factors into account, psychologists can discount the value of an IQ score in the final report. They also can use the

intelligence test in a constructive way to help them learn about how a child attacks cognitive problems, relates to authority, deals with stress or why he or she makes certain kinds of mistakes. Feuerstein (1970) perfected such a testing technique with Jewish orphans sent to Israel following World War II. He uses tests to figure out how a child learns and why he or she makes mistakes rather than as a way of defining a child's intellectual level. I interviewed and observed psychologists in the suburbs of Chicago who had essentially the same philosophy of testing as Feuerstein.

I could go on at some length telling you about intelligence testing and the difference between the sort of routinized testing that goes on in many city school systems and the more careful, diverse sort of evaluation that psychologists tend to carry out in their clinical practices and which I observed with some suburban school psychologists. I am finishing a book which does this. For now, I wish only to make two points. First, the way intelligence tests are designed and used in laboratory settings tends not to be the way they are used in schools. Whatever biases exist in them in the laboratory are different than the biases that operate when they are used in schools. Second, while tests may inevitably be biased those biases are only a matter of concern if they are not recognized and if people do not try to correct them as they gather data and report on the performance of children.

TIME BUDGETS AND TESTING.

All of this background about how the biases built into intelligence tests might be taken intc account by school psychologists is not reflected in the actual practices of most people who

give tests in public schools. While I have suggested that some psychologists in suburbs are quite careful, suburbs are not immune to hurried, mechanical intelligence testing. If we look at Tables One through Three we see, however, that school psychologists who test Black children and city children are markedly less careful than psychologists who test white children and nonurban children. I will define "carefulness" in this section in terms of the time structure of the testing process and by the fact that psychologists who test black children apparently either leave out parts of tests or give tests hurriedly. Since there is danger that tests are biased against blacks, this lack of carefulness makes it unlikely that school psychologists avoid testing biases. They are not likely to recognize particular instances in which a child may be disadvantaged by cultural deprivations or differences because they will be in a rush to finish and they will not question how test items apply to particular subjects. They also are not likely to take the time required to develop proper rapport with students which may require chatting, giving extra time to complete items and so on. Test bias may occur with whites as well but because blacks are at greater risk of being labeled retarded, the lack of care taken with black children is troublesome. By increasing the likelihood that black children will be labeled, it contributes to the belief by laymen that blacks are stupid.

The data concern the length of time psychologists report spending with each child they test and a closely related variable, the number of tests psychologists conduct during a school year. There is a strong negative correlation generally between the

number of "child studies" psychologists conduct each year and the amount of time they devote to each one (r=-.38, n=197) which we shall discuss presently and which is reflected in the first two tables. A child study is a student evaluation procedure in which a psychologist: (1) uses individual psychological evaluation techniques; (2) discusses findings in staffing meetings and case conferences in which children are considered for placement in special classes; and (3) writes a report showing findings and recommendations. The child study may or may not include classroom observations, consultation with parents or discussions with a child's teacher outside of routinely scheduled meetings. In reporting time data I have used medians rather than means because a few psychologists work in special diagnostic centers where they spend days rather than hours evaluating children. This distorts the means.

In Table One we see that the inverse relationship between the

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Table One Here

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number of child studies psychologists conduct and the time they devote to each one results for psychologists who serve districts with many black children in conducting many child studies each year while they spend relatively little time (3.9 hours) on each one. Psychologists who serve districts with few black children conduct fewer child studies and spend more than 50% more time on each (6.3 hours). The differences between the testing practices of

psychologists who serve blacks and whites is significant beyond the .001 level for both variables.

Table Two shows essentially the same pattern for psychologists who work in the City of Chicago and psychologists who work outside of the City, although the differences between the two groups are

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Table Two Here

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somewhat more extreme than in Table One. Psychologists in Chicago conduct more than twice as many child studies each year as psychologists elsewhere (the difference would be more extreme if we compared only Chicago and the suburbs). At the same time they spend only 55% as much time on each child study (3.6 hours) as do psychologists elsewhere (6.6 hours).

The difference between black and white children has mainly to do with the fact, demonstrated in Table Three, that most black children served by psychologists in my sample live in the City of Chicago. If

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Table Three Here

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we control for school district location, it turns out that the differences between the ways black and white children are tested actually are more extreme outside of Chicago (although these differences are small) than within that city where blacks and whites receive pretty much the same treatment. The race differences reported in Table One thus reflect the differences between urban and nonurban districts. Black children are not directly discriminated against although the preservation of outmoded and biased testing practices in the City of Chicago may not be unrelated to the large number of poor and minority children who are enrolled in city schools.

The importance of these findings may not be apparent to people who are unfamiliar with the process of intelligence testing. When a school psychologist conducts a child study, there normally are at least three parts to the examination which are outlined in the definition I just gave of what a child study is: testing; meetings to discuss the case; and report writing. The critical thing is that each of these activities is highly structured and tends to take a fixed amount of time. Thus the amount of time psychologists spend on each child study tells us a lot about the way that psychologists go about their work, especially as that time gets small. Let me go over the activities that make up a child study to make this clearer.

When I followed school psychologists around as they did child studies, I found that most administered a battery of three or four tests. There always was an individual intelligence scale which usually was the Revised Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R) and occasionally was the Stanford Binet. Most people also gave one or two short projective tests---the Bender Gestalt Test and the House-Tree-Person test were most common. Then they would administer an achievement test like the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) and in some cases they would top the session off with the Rorschach Test, a more comprehensive projective instrument. According to my watch, it was hard to get through all of these tests in less than two and one half hours.

Often psychologists would conduct tests in the morning and then meet with people in the afternoon. Since parents are required to sign a permission form allowing psychologists to give tests, some wanted to know what happened and might come in to talk with

the psychologist in the afternoon. Then psychologists might also meet with two groups of school personnel. First, they would get together with the school nurse, the social worker and either a special teacher or a speech therapist. Each of these people would collect their own data on the child and people would compare notes. After they had come to some agreement on the child, they would sit down with the regular class teacher, the principal and perhaps again the parents.

Some place along the line, the psychologist must analyse the test results and write up a report. Since psychologists can only guess how a child did before analysing the test data, they often avoid meetings with parents and other school staff until they have a chance to write up their reports. Report writing is a slow procedure, however. Most psychologists claim that it takes as long to score and write up test results as it takes to give tests. Since they are out in schools at least four days per week, it often takes psychologists a week or two to get around to completing reports and to be ready for meetings. Because report writing is slow, meetings often become opportunities to discuss many cases at once rather than just a single one.

If you have been adding up hours, it should be clear that it is hard to go through this whole procedure in less than six or seven hours. This is about what is reported in the suburbs and outside of the Chicago metropolitan area. It is hard to see where one could cut time to get down to the Chicago median of 3.6 hours or to the 3.9 hours black students receive. It happens in two ways. First, many cases are allowed to build up before meetings are held to

discuss how they should be disposed of. This allows meeting time to be greatly reduced. In my earlier book I described evaluation meetings in two cities. In one each case took an average of forty seconds. In the other the whole special education department spent a morning discussing one case. There can be huge differences. A second way to cut time is by reducing the number of tests one gives and by spending less time building rapport in giving them.

I should note that neither of these shortcuts are the exclusive province of Chicago psychologists. All psychologists are pressed for time and on occasion cut things out. That is probably why psychologists outside of Chicago report spending only six or seven hours on each child study. Sometimes they spend more and other times when they don't think all of the information of a full test battery is needed, they spend less time with a child.

Something more dangerous is going on in Chicago. As psychologists give more tests, which they do in the city, they spend less time on each child study. Because report writing takes up a lot of time and is not visible to the people who ask for tests---school principals mainly---people tend to ask psychologists to give more tests than those psychologists have time for. People tend to misperceive how busy psychologists are and what their limits are. They tend to think that since psychologists' time is less structured than other educators that they do not work hard or do much productive work. They do not feel bad about expecting them to do more. They do not understand that psychologists often feel peripheral to schools (they serve four or five of them on average) and that psychologists often feel that they cannot contribute much to the day to day life of schools because they are always running around giving tests.

If they are to reduce the demand for testing, psychologists must be able to take time out to explain how their job works. They must educate educators about their schedule and ideally they can convince them there are things other than testing that a psychologist might profitably do in a school. This sort of lobbying takes time, however. If people have time to do things other than test, they can work to further reduce their testing time. If they have a heavy testing load, however, people tend to become increasingly hemmed into a narrow bureaucratic role over which they have little control. Principals assign more testing and to combat the demand pressure psychologists look for ways to streamline their child study procedures. This is what has happened in Chicago. What amounts to a culture of rapid testing has built up so that psychologists do not even think seriously about trying to convince their regular school counterparts that they should test less.

In summary, I am offering a sort of pneumatic theory of time budgeting and testing patterns among school psychologists. There is a fixed amount of time that it takes to complete the standard child study activities. There also are a fixed number of hours in each week. If one divides the hours per week by the fixed block of time required for testing, allowing some hours for travel, administrative meetings and other unavoidable necessities, there is a fixed upper limit on the number of child studies one can do without cutting the time devoted to each one. Below this limit, psychologists have quite a bit of flexibility in deciding whether they want to throw in extra evaluation activities---like observing in class or visiting at home. Once the limit is hit and surpassed, psychologists have less and less flexibility about how they will use

their time and about what measures they might take to protect against the biases in the tests. By the time the testing rate which predominates in Chicago is achieved, there is virtually no time for thought, consideration or special measures.

Unless a child's IQ score is unexpectedly high, in Chicago referral for a psychological evaluation is tantamount to placement in a special class. Since the mean IQ of black people in this country is 85, 15 points below the population mean and 7 points above the level which allows for placement in a class for the retarded, black children are, as Mercer (1971) argued, especially vulnerable to labeling. Whatever moves school administrators to pick this black child rather than that one for testing---Berk, Bridges and Shih (1981) could find no systematic reasons---those children are likely to find themselves in a special class if space allows.

THE SYMBOLISM OF INTELLIGENCE

This story is important because stereotypes about how different groups perform intellectually justify inequality and by justifying it help reproduce the class structure from generation to generation. Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Lillian Rubin (1976) among others have argued that an important function of schooling is to convince low income and working class children that they are not intellectually talented. Because they are not talented they do not deserve high status jobs which, most people believe, require intelligence and sophisticated cognitive skills. Receiving low grades, being placed in a slow track and seeing that children like oneself also do poorly all conspire to convince poor children that they deserve to receive

low paying jobs in adulthood. This instruction about one's potential provides a means for sorting children into different career tracks which is sensitive to their social class backgrounds while at the same time discouraging the losers in status competition from questioning the fairness of the system and rebelling.

Some of these messages about their limited futures are communicated to individuals through poor test scores and grades. Others, though they seem to be individual, are symbolic and communicate to other children and to people in the community about the kinds of opportunities, or the lack of opportunities, that they can expect from schooling. Intelligence testing by school psychologists is this sort of symbolic activity. Intelligence is one of the most valued qualities people may have in our society and intelligence tests have attained mythic proportions as the means by which we judge intelligence. Yet school psychologists in Chicago seem minimally concerned with using tests properly or with being sure that the results they obtain are fair to the children who are tested. This can partly be explained by their difficult working conditions. But more important, there is no functional connection between testing and the other things which happen to children to make psychologists more accountable. Tests are not used to help prescribe instructional programs for children in special education according to my survey. They seem primarily a means of legitimating decisions already made by the teachers and principals who refer children for special classes. Because few people understand what tests are about, nobody questions the manner in which tests are given. Testing helps head off criticism from parents and others who would object that teachers might be arbitrary about who they choose to send to special education

classes. They do not know about the arbitrariness of the testers.

School psychologists have done their legitimation work well because thanks to them, people interested in improving students' intellectual performance have focussed their attention on the attributes of children. The debate about whether or not there are genetic differences between races in intelligence is largely inspired by the belief that black children do badly in schools because they lack intellectual skills as measured by intelligence tests. I have no real doubt that many black children do have inadequate literacy skills. But the information we have about what the intellectual skills of black children are like or could be like to not come from an independent, disinterested bureau of standards. Our impressions about how serious are the intellectual deficits of minorities come from the work of people like school psychologists. In truth, we have no idea to what extent the failure of these children in school is caused by institutional problems. Yet we have been distracted into arguing about something quite removed from the institutional situation in which education happens. When we talk about cognitive skills, we talk about a scientific instrument, an abstract measure of questionable accuracy and about the attributes of children. By being so distracted, we do not see the subtle ways in which the structure and practices of schools work to legitimate status inequality.

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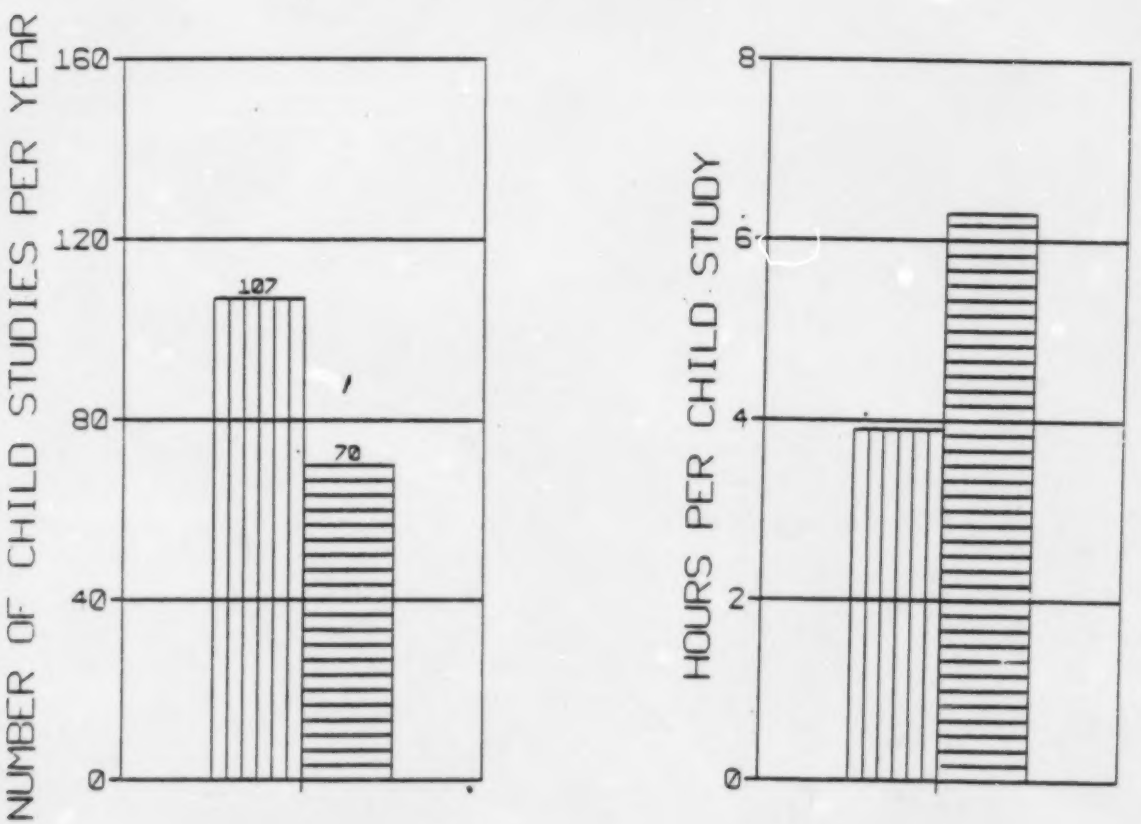
RATE OF TESTING BY RACE

Table 1. For school psychologists working in districts more and less than one third black, the number of child studies they conduct per year and the median number of hours they report devoting to each child study.

Correlation of % of students black and number of child studies=.38. P<.001

Correlation of % of students black with hours per child study=-.31. P<.001



RATE OF TESTING AND DISTRICT LOCATION

Table 2. For psychologists working for the Chicago Public Schools and outside of Chicago, the median number of child studies they conduct per year and the median number of hours that they devote to each child study.

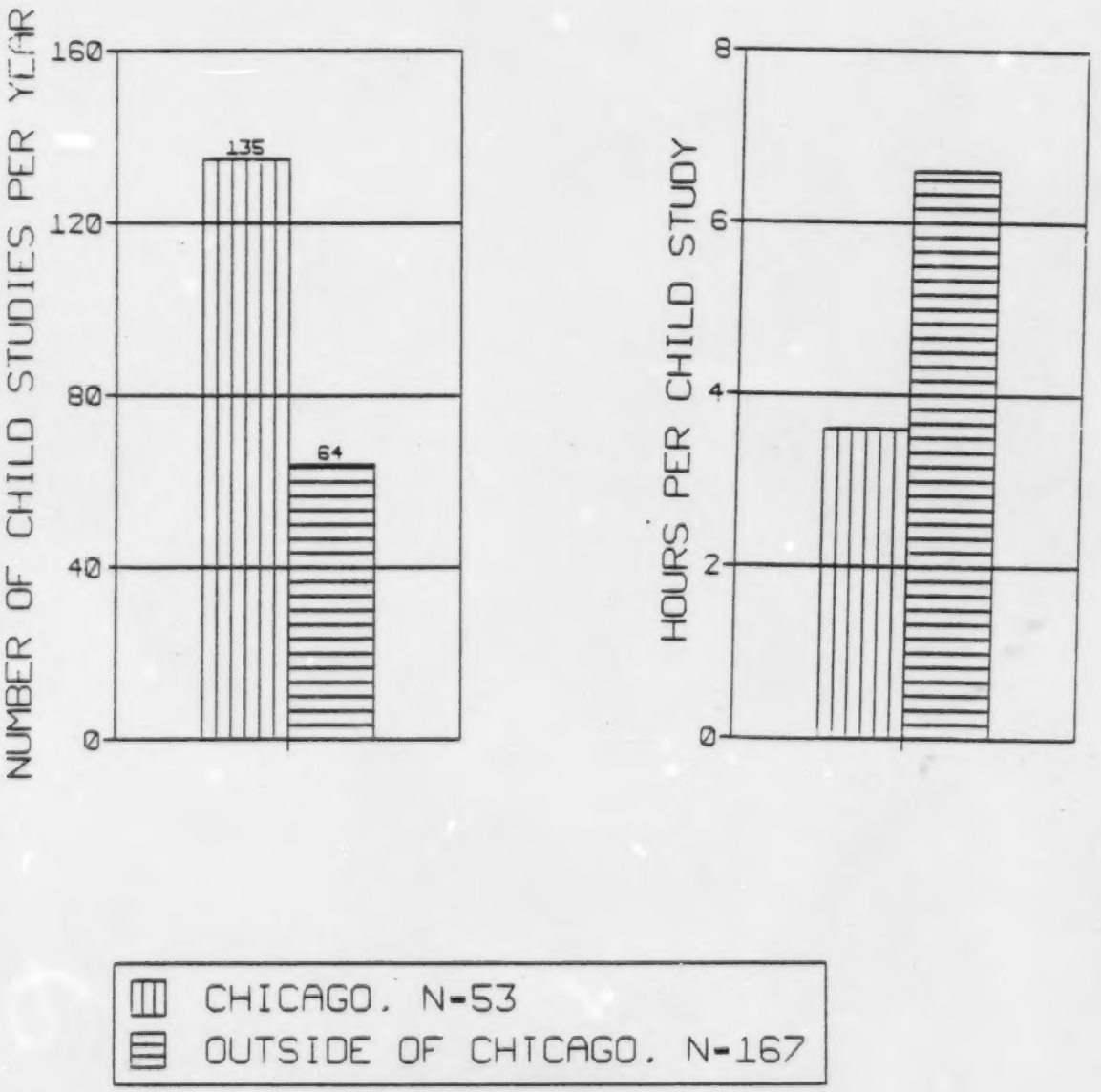


Table 3. Crosstabulation of race and types of school districts. Psychologists were asked what proportion of students in the school districts they served were black. This is related to whether they worked for the Chicago Public Schools or for school districts elsewhere in Illinois. The vast majority of psychologists reporting that they serve in districts with many black students work for the Chicago Public Schools.

COUNT
COLUMN %

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN DISTRICTS SERVED WHO ARE BLACK	DISTRICT LOCATION: CHICAGO	DISTRICT LOCATION: ELSEWHERE IN ILLINOIS	TOTAL
LESS THAN 34%	18 30.5%	144 86.7%	162 72%
34% TO 66%	9 15.3%	19 11.4%	28 12%
MORE THAN 66%	32 54.2%	3 1.8%	35 16%
TOTAL	59 26%	166 74%	225
MEAN	62.1%	11.4%	